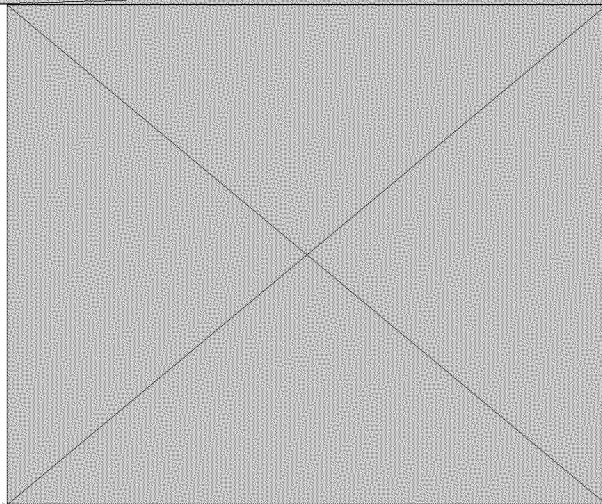
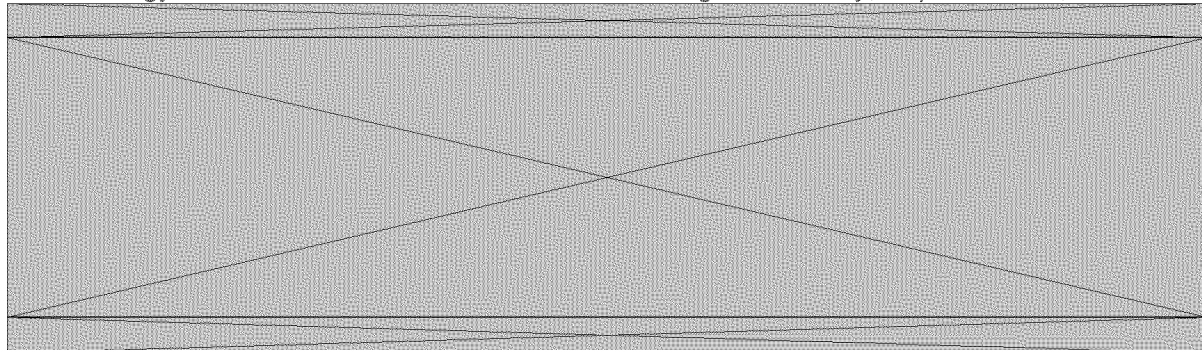


To: Murray, Bill[Murray.Bill@epa.gov]
From: EnergyGuardian
Sent: Thur 9/24/2015 11:13:09 AM
Subject: Republicans rebuff Obama's wildfire plan, press for action on House bill

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Energy and environment headlines for the morning of Thursday, September 24, 2015



Republicans rebuff Obama's wildfire plan, press for action on House bill

By Kevin Rogers

Republican lawmakers on Wednesday rejected an Obama administration appeal to change the federal wildfire funding system, saying it failed to improve effective forest management. Instead, they pressed for Senate action on a House-passed bill that the White House "strongly opposes."

On a call with reporters, House Natural Resources Chairman Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, Rep.

Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., and Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., said any reform to the wildfire system would require updates to how the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service maintain federal forests.

"There's no amount of increased funding that's going to decrease the occurrence of catastrophic wildfires unless we provide the Forest Service with the tools they need to expand treatments to produce healthy fire-resistant forests," Bishop said, calling the agencies' current management program "pitiful."

The remarks came in response to a [letter](#) Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Office of Management and Budget Director Shaun Donovan sent to Congress last week, seeking reforms to the current system.

The officials called for discretionary spending caps they said would reduce the need for the agencies to divert funds from other programs, a process referred to as "fire borrowing." The officials said the current system of funding, which bases firefighting budgets on a 10-year average, was inadequate to meet the needs of longer, more intense seasons.

"Due to longer fire seasons resulting from climate change, increased fuel loads in our forests and on our rangelands, and the expense associated with protecting lives and homes along an expanding wildland urban interface, the 10-year average keeps rising and will continue to rise," the officials said.

The lawmakers said that approach would amount to a "Band-Aid" throwing more money at wildfires. They pressed for action on the Resilient Federal Forests Act, which the House approved in July by a vote of 262 to 167, with 19 Democrats in support.

The bill would allow the Forest Service and BLM to request funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency after firefighting funds are depleted and require faster reforestation of burned acreage.

It would also seek to expedite forest management and timber projects through exempting some areas from environmental review, and discourage litigation by requiring plaintiffs to buy a bond to reimburse federal expenses if they lose the case.

The White House, however, in a [Statement of Administration Policy](#), voiced opposition to the bill, saying it would "undermine collaborative forest restoration, environmental safeguards, and public participation across the National Forest System and public lands."

The administration also faulted the bill's FEMA provisions, arguing it would inappropriately strain disaster funds, though it stopped short of issuing a veto threat.

The administration prefers the approach offered by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., that would adjust discretionary spending caps and develop a separate wildfire disaster fund.

Daines, regardless of the administration's stance, said that he's leading an effort in the Senate to adopt the measure and working to win enough Democratic support to send it to President Obama's desk.

"I think this fall we do have the best opportunity in recent memory to pass these reforms," he said. "On the Senate side, we're working with Republicans and Democrats alike to force a similar consensus to get something to the president's desk this fall. I think it would be irresponsible and a missed opportunity to only address the wildfire funding issue without also passing reforms to improve the management of the forests in the first place."

The legislation is set to be considered by the Senate Agriculture Committee in the coming weeks, Daines said.

According to the federal government's tally, wildfires have already burned more than 8.5 million acres, and the Forest Service has been required to transfer an additional \$700 million this year from non-fire accounts to fund suppression efforts.

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Upcoming Events

EPA says it will build temporary treatment plant for mine

By Dan Elliott

DENVER (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday it will set up a temporary treatment plant for wastewater flowing from the Gold King Mine in southwestern Colorado after 3 million gallons surged out of the mine in August, tainting rivers in three states.

Colorado's two U.S. senators urged the agency to build a longer-term plant to treat acidic water flowing from multiple mines in the Upper Animas River watershed around Silverton, saying pollution from inactive shafts is a serious problem across the West.

The EPA said it needs the temporary plant for the Gold King Mine because it will be unsafe to operate the settling ponds that are now in use when winter temperatures fall below zero.

The \$1.8 million facility is expected to start operating by Oct. 14 and run for up to 42 weeks. The EPA said it will cost \$20,000 a week to operate.

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Pope to make historic address to Congress, climate change a topic

By Erica Werner and Nicole Winfield

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fresh from enrapturing crowds all over Washington, Pope Francis is bringing his resonant message of humility and hope to Capitol Hill as he becomes the first pontiff in history to speak to a joint meeting of Congress.

Ahead of Francis' remarks lawmakers of both parties have busily sought political advantage from his stances, with Democrats in particular delighting in his support for action to combat global warming and income inequality, and overhaul immigration laws. One House Republican back-bencher announced plans to boycott the speech over Francis' activist position on climate change, which the pontiff renewed alongside President Barack Obama on Wednesday.

Lawmakers of all political backgrounds and religious affiliations have thrilled to the pope's arrival, however, pledging to pause from the bickering and dysfunction that normally divide them and hear him out Thursday morning. Tens of thousands of spectators will be watching from the West Lawn of the Capitol and many more on TV from around the world as the pope addresses a House chamber packed with Supreme Court justices, Cabinet officials, diplomats, lawmakers and their guests.

After the sergeant at arms announces him by bellowing "Mr. Speaker, the pope of the Holy See," Francis will enter the chamber and climb to the dais where the president delivers the annual State of the Union address and monarchs and heads of state have addressed Congress. Behind him will sit Vice President Joe Biden and House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio, the first and second in line to the presidency, both Catholics.

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Xi says 'without reform' no progress for business in China

By Gene Johnson and Phuong Le

SEATTLE (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, billionaire investor Warren Buffett and other top American and Chinese business leaders Wednesday, vowing that his country would work to remove barriers to foreign investment and improve intellectual property protections.

Xi's conference with the business leaders in Seattle was part of a busy day. He also toured the Boeing production facility in Everett, the sprawling suburban Microsoft campus and visited a high school in Tacoma, where he received a football and a personalized jersey.

Protesters and supporters of Xi holding signs in English and Chinese lined the streets outside Microsoft's Redmond campus and also waited outside the high school.

Apple CEO Tim Cook, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Jack Ma of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba also were among the 30 executives who attended a closed-door discussion moderated by former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson before Xi's address.

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\$134M for recovery projects arising from 2010 Gulf oil spill

By Cain Burdeau

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A panel on Wednesday approved using \$134 million provided by energy giant BP PLC on 10 projects to help the Gulf of Mexico recover from a catastrophic 2010 oil spill.

The approval came from a trustee council made up of Gulf coast states and federal officials overseeing ecological restoration from the offshore spill. About \$126 million will go to projects to help sea turtles, fish, vegetation and birds and \$8 million on enhancing recreational uses.

In 2011, BP offered to spend \$1 billion to spur the recovery of the Gulf, anticipating future restoration costs meted out through the courts. BP is expected to spend billions of dollars more on restoration.

An April 2010 blowout at a well BP and its contractors were drilling touched off the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history. The explosion and fire aboard the Deepwater Horizon rig killed 11 workers and crews took nearly three months to cap the leak, which some experts estimated at more than 130 million gallons of oil.

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Dealers, owners feel frustrated and betrayed by VW scandal

By Gillian Flaccus and Tom Krisher

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bob Rand bought his Volkswagen Passat last year for its clean emissions and high gas mileage. He liked the car so much he convinced his son and a friend to buy one, too.

Now, as Volkswagen comes clean about rigging diesel emissions to pass U.S. tests, Rand is desperately trying to sell the fully loaded model with white leather seats for \$10,000 below what he paid. His sole bite has been from a man who offered \$7,500 on speculation that he could resell it in Mexico.

"Volkswagen was somebody that you could rely on for cutting-edge products and quality and all those things and now you find out that they're not above lying just flat out," said Rand, who plans to join a class-action lawsuit against VW. "That's probably about as bad a thing as a company can do is lie to your face when you're buying a \$35,000 car."

Rand's anger at the world's top-selling car company was echoed Wednesday by private dealers, auto wholesalers and owners across the U.S. as fallout from the smog test trickery mounted.

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A message from America's Natural Gas Alliance

Clean is Powerful. Natural gas helps Georgia Power's plant generate electricity with 50% fewer emissions. Think about it.

[Learn more at www.thinkaboutit.org.](http://www.thinkaboutit.org)

Scientists: Drought stressing California's Giant Sequoias

By Scott Smith

SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — Giant Sequoias growing in California's Sierra Nevada are among the largest and oldest living things on earth, but scientists climbing high up into their green canopies say they are seeing symptoms of stress caused by the state's historic drought.

Patches of brown, dead foliage are appearing more than in past years, say researchers studying the iconic trees, which only grow naturally in the Sierra Nevada. By taking stock of groves that are most vulnerable, scientists say they can better manage the forest through the hotter, drier droughts expected in the future.

"They're beautiful, majestic trees," said Koren Nydick, a National Park Service ecologist and part of the research team focused on the treasured trees. "People come from all over the world to see the Giant Sequoias."

Some living more than 3,000 years, Giant Sequoias grow to nearly 300 feet tall. There are other trees that live longer and some that grow taller, but researchers say the Giant Sequoias are unique for their size and longevity.

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Weak growth outlook pushes oil-rich Norway to cut rates

By The Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Concerned by weaker economic growth, the central bank of oil-rich Norway has cut its key interest rate to its lowest level ever, 0.75 percent, and hinted that it could reduce it further.

Norges Bank said Thursday that growth was likely to remain low "for a longer period than projected earlier" because of weak oil prices and that oil investments were expected to fall further.

It also said that lower demand for goods and services from the energy sector would hit other parts of the economy and increase unemployment.

On the bright side, the bank mentioned a weaker currency would encourage exports and help domestic companies compete with importers.

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Congress Gears up for Papal Visit.

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House to tackle measure banning social cost of carbon calculations

The government wouldn't be able to consider the "social cost of carbon" in its review of regulations, under a provision of the Rapid Act that the House is scheduled to begin debating, National Journal reports.

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LWCF supporters look to short-term funding

With authorization for the Land and Water Conservation Fund likely to expire next week, backers of the program are trying to ensure that any general short-term government funding measure that's approved will include LWCF, National Journal reports.

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Wind lease sale planned in November for offshore NJ coast

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Calling it a “major step in standing up a sustainable offshore wind program,” Interior Secretary Sally Jewell Wednesday announced a Nov. 9 sale of nearly 344,000 acres of leases in the Atlantic off the coast of New Jersey, The Associated Press reports.

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New Halliburton layoffs to affect management

Halliburton's latest cost cutting plan to weather the continuing oil slump will include management jobs, FuelFix reports.

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Oil higher on profit taking

Traders trying to cash in on a sharp drop in oil sent prices moving the other way early Thursday. U.S. benchmark jumped 48 cents to \$44.96 a barrel in electronic trading on the Nymex, while in London Brent rose 40 cents to \$48.15, Reuters reports.

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Summer prices dropped for MISO in 2015, monitor told board

A monitor told Midcontinent Independent System Operator executives that despite higher demand, real-time electricity prices dropped in the MISO region this summer because of cheaper fuel, Platts reports.

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Tesla, SolarCity at odds over net metering

Tesla and SolarCity may be partners in the battery storage business, but they part company when it comes to SolarCity's support of net metering in California, E&E reports.

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Second U.S. probe of Total gas trades, company looking to settle

Total CEO Patrick Pouyanne says his company is negotiating to settle an investigation by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission into some of its market trades, and is willing to settle with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission as well, The Wall Street Journal reports.

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Revised Energy Transfer offer on the table at Williams

A revised offer from Energy Transfer Equity will be the subject of a board meeting at Williams Cos., possibly as early as this week, sources have told Reuters.

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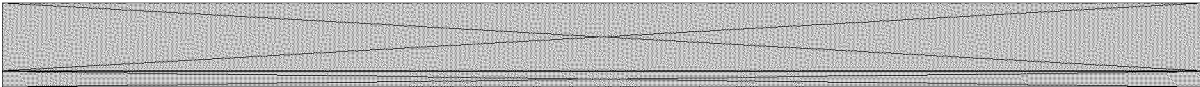
LA River restoration: Critics attack Gehry involvement

Architect Frank Gehry's participation in the project to restore the Los Angeles River area has generated a storm of protest from community leaders, The New York Times reports.

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Upcoming Events

- Sep. 24, Washington: Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., to speak at a Heritage Foundation event on the forthcoming meeting between President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping on issues including cybersecurity and environmental policy. 3:00 pm , 214 Massachusetts Ave NE.
- Sep. 24, Washington: Pope Francis to address a joint meeting of Congress 10:00 am , U.S. Capitol Building.



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